



# Gunnison Focus Area

## Partners for Fish and Wildlife in Colorado

### Introduction and General Description

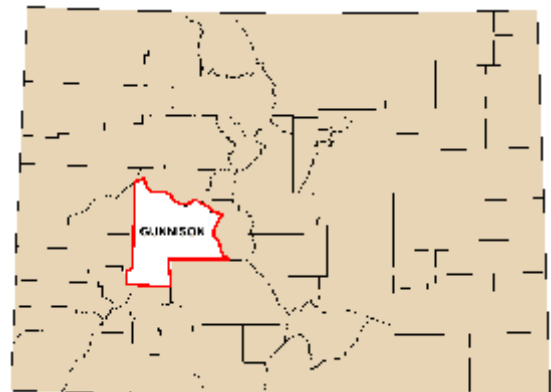
The Gunnison Valley is located in west-central Colorado at an elevation of approximately 7,700 feet. Several streams and rivers converge in the area to form the Gunnison River. Wet meadows, sagebrush steppe, and irrigated pasture/hay fields predominate the non-forested areas of the valley.

### Habitats of Special Concern

Sagebrush steppe and wet meadow are the Focus Area habitat types for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The Gunnison sage grouse is a candidate for Federal listing, and the Partners Program is working with landowners to restore its habitat.

### Threats

Sagebrush control and season-long grazing were the primary impacts to sage grouse habitat in the past. Housing development associated with expanding opportunities in Gunnison, the Crested Butte ski area, and second home construction is a potential threat.



Gunnison Focus Area location map.

### Conservation Strategies

The Gunnison sage grouse relies on both private and public lands for habitat. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program provides a mechanism for habitat restoration efforts to occur on private lands. These efforts will complement those to be taken on Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest

Service properties.

### Sagebrush Habitat

Sagebrush in the area often lacks a herbaceous understory of grasses and forbs. This understory provides cover and food for adult and young sage grouse. The limited use of a "Dixie Harrow" opens the sage canopy, allowing an understory of grasses and forbs to reestablish. Seeding of native species and exclusion of grazing until the vegetation is established are also project components.

### Wet Meadows

Wet meadows are important foraging areas for sage grouse broods due to their high insect production. Throughout the West, water development has reduced spring flows through water diversion and storage. Cooperating landowners see irrigation water as a tool for habitat enhancement and



Dixie Harrow used to stimulate understory growth in sagebrush.

are willing to use their water for wildlife. Use of irrigation water and floodplain topography allows the restoration of wet meadow habitat values. Although sage grouse brood foraging is the primary goal, these projects also benefit many species of shorebirds, waterfowl, and neotropical migratory birds.

Most restoration projects for Gunnison sage grouse include both upland and wet meadow components. The average cost for this work is \$112/acre.



**Wet meadow habitat.**

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## Partners

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program in the Gunnison Focus Area has developed funding and planning relationships with several private landowners and:

Colorado Division of Wildlife  
Great Outdoors Colorado  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Ducks Unlimited  
Local conservation groups.

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## Accomplishments

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife effort in this Focus Area is less than one year old, yet we have had a great start.

- 8 landowner agreements have been developed.
- 800 acres of sagebrush and wet meadow restored.
- An additional 12 projects are planned for 2001.

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## Future Needs

- Expansion of our current focus is the primary goal to be achieved. We estimate that 15,000 acres of habitat could be restored in this Focus Area.
- Evaluation of habitat restoration efforts and use by sage grouse and other target species is needed.
- Opportunities to work with ranchers on stream and wetland restoration will be explored.



**Gunnison sage grouse.**

*Copywritten photo by Louis Swift.*